

TRIPLE TAKE

STORY: Randy Holden

PHOTOS: Al & Lynne Rogers
Photographed in Bloomfield, MI.

Through the years, in our travels to shows across the country, we've encountered a lot of serious die-hard Mopar families out there. More often than not, the stories are much the same; dad, or granddad, started the ball rolling owning Chrysler products back when the tradition is then picked up by following generations and continues. It may sound really old school, but Mopar roots run deep, and that's the gospel truth. You'll find a lot of Mopar families out there, but among the many, the VanCura clan up in Bloomfield, Michigan has something rather unique going on. Why's that?

Because between Garth VanCura Sr. and Garth Jr., the father and son duo has three 1971 Hemi Charger Super Bees. When you consider only twenty-two of these things were built, the idea there are three of them in one family is just about unbelievable. Well, believe it, because it's true.

Garth VanCura the elder is where it all began. Garth Sr. had been a Chrysler guy most of his life, and in 1974, he bought a used FE5 red 1971 Hemi Charger Super Bee. Of course, at that time, this was nothing more than a hot used car. With insurance prices high and gas prices rising closer to a dollar a gallon (amazing), a lot of muscle cars ended up sitting on used car lots by 1974. Garth bought the bright red low-mileage Charger and began using it as his regular driver in summer. Since the winters in Milford, Michigan are a bit harsh, Garth parked the torque-laden Hemi when the roads got

slippery, but when the leaves turned green, the car was back on the road. This thrilled his son, Garth Jr., as the boy was ten-years-old when his dad bought the car, and obviously, something like this can have a profound effect on an impressionable youth. When you're already reaching the age of automotive awareness, having your father buy a red Hemi Charger is way more than enough to push you over the edge into being a full-bore Mopar muscle fanatic. The sane member of the family, Mom Jacquelyn, could see the lustful gleam in the younger Garth's eyes whenever the red Dodge fired up. She knew what effect the car had on her otherwise mild-mannered husband, and she feared what it would do if her teenage son ever got his hands on it. With the acquisition of his drivers license drawing close, dad caved to pressure from the missus and sold the

THREE HEMIS FROM THE HIVE... ONE FAMILY TRADITION





Super Bee in 1978 for \$2,200. For the moment, mom succeeded in keeping her son out of a fast Mopar, but only briefly. When Garth the younger turned sixteen, he bought a 1971 'Cuda - so much for keeping him out of a fast Mopar.

As both Garths aged, they spent more-and-more leisure time acquiring old Dodges and Plymouths, working on them together and attending shows and cruise night functions. Garth Jr.'s had a wide variety of cars through the years, and Garth Sr. currently has a '71 Cuda and a '48 Chrysler in the garage. As the guys mellowed and matured, Garth Jr. found himself wishing he could get his dad's old Hemi Charger Super Bee back. Hoy, who doesn't always have a soft spot for the car they grew up with? Since '71 Hemi Super Bees don't exactly grow on trees, Garth didn't entertain the idea of finding his dad's old car for long before he decided it would be a whole lot easier, and a whole lot cheaper, to recreate the car. In 1999, he found an original '71 Charger Super Bee body sitting in Chelsea, Michigan. This one was a factory 340 automatic car, but the motor and transmission were long gone, along

with a lot of parts and trim pieces. Still, it was a factory '71 Charger Super Bee, so it provided Garth with a starting point to recreate his father's red Hemi Bee. Unfortunately, once he got the Bee home and started looking things over, the car was a bit rustier than he'd bargained for, but the price had been right so he wasn't too upset, it just meant the project would take a little longer than anticipated.

While Garth Jr. began gathering parts for recreating his dad's old car, Garth Sr. watched from the sidelines with great interest, and his enthusiasm for his old Hemi Charger Bee came back in spades. He'd always regretted selling the red car, so once he saw his boy working to recreate the machine, he paid close attention to the progress. Seeing his dad's interest, Garth Jr. took notice of an advertisement he spied right here in the pages of MCG, only a few months after he bought his rusty relic '71. A gorgeous gray metallic '71 Hemi Charger Super Bee was for sale in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, and the price (for that time) seemed very reasonable. Junior asked dad if he'd be interested in making a major purchase, and soon enough, they were doing some conference call work to find out the details.

As it turned out, the recently restored gray Hemi Bee was a former drag car that had spent most of its formative years on the race track, so it was a relatively low mileage machine. What didn't make much sense was that this was a very heavily optioned car, with a black leather interior and a host of creature comforts, which would seem to indicate the car hadn't been ordered for racing, it just ended up that way. The car had new quarter panels hung on it, there was fresh paint, mechanically it was all fresh, and the black leather interior smelled like walking into a boot store, so how could these guys resist something this gorgeous? Garth Sr. parted company with

some greenbacks and took the charcoal gray and black Hemi Bee home to Michigan, instantly becoming the envy of every Mopar guy within a hundred miles. True to his lifelong creed, despite this Charger being an absolute show quality restoration, he likes to light the fires and haze the tires. The gray car sees regular use on cruise nights, and every year, this one can be found ripping it up at the Woodward Dream Cruise, which is Garth Sr.'s favorite event.

Meanwhile, with dad enjoying his fully restored one-of-one gray Hemi Charger Super Bee, Garth Jr. rolled up his sleeves and started turning his dis-



DAD'S REPLACEMENT '71 HEMI CHARGER SUPER BEE



ressed '71 Charger into a recreation of the car he'd been denied as a teenager. The rusty 340 car was sent over to Reiter's Metal Craft in Mount Clemens, Michigan, where most of the original rotted steel was cut away and pitched in the dumpster. Since there were few repro items around when this one was being reconstructed, the guys relied on finding rust-free vintage sheet metal to put the car back together, and after a year, or thereabouts, of cutting and welding, this thing looked like a Charger once again. The now straight body was sprayed in R4 red inside and out, a

white Legendary interior was selected to fill the car's guts, and to make everything as kosher as possible, a fresh Hemi, built by Dave Koffel, was placed under the hood. The Hemi's a bit more radical than your average stock mill, making 620 horses on the dyno with 550 ft. lbs of torque! All that power is hooked to a 3.91 geared 8-3/4" rear. Needless to say, the tires don't stand a chance when the hammer's dropped! After four years of writing checks and chasing parts, Garth Jr. finished recreating his dad's old Super Bee and they began cruising around together, father and son, with their Hemi Charger Bees - then, something weird happened.

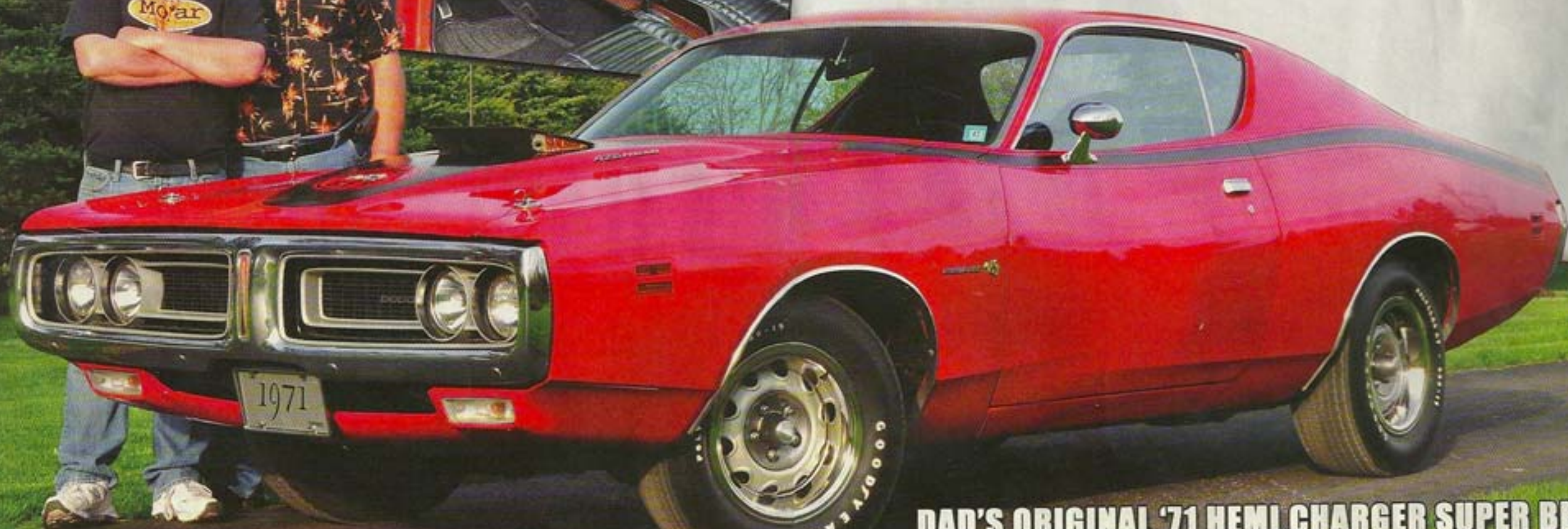
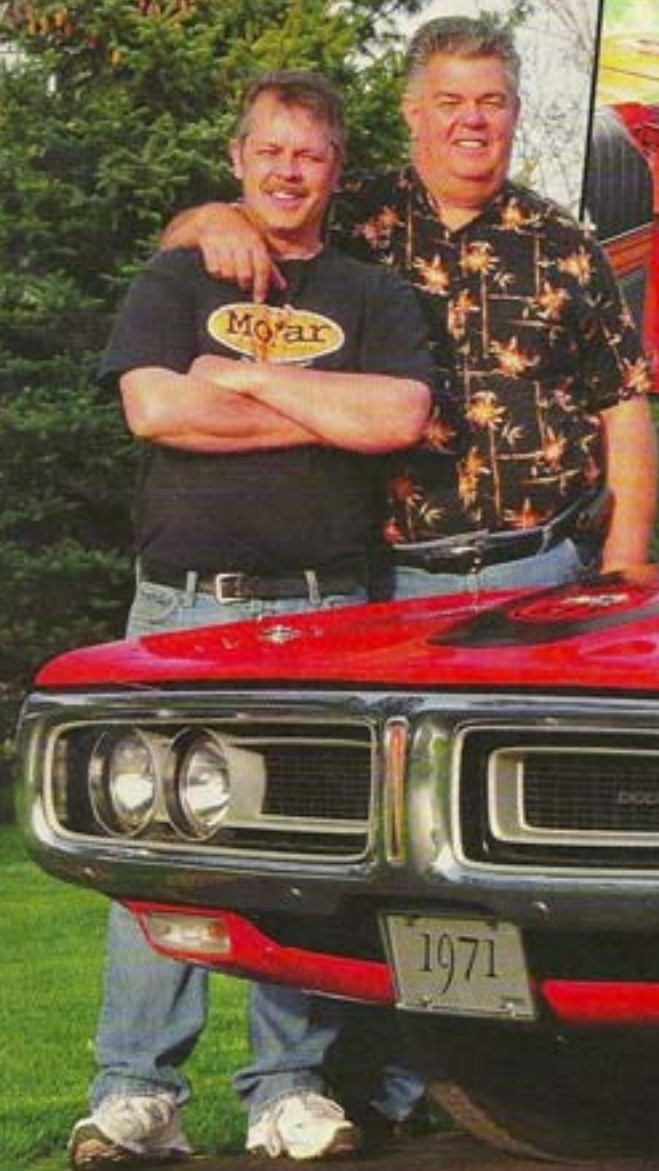
There was order in the universe until 2008, when Garth Jr. was looking at the dreaded eBay website and happened to see a very familiar looking red '71 Charger Super Bee for sale in an online auction. The car looked just like his dad's old Bee, so he got his dad to look at it as well, and he concurred. Since dad had sold the car in 1978, neither of them had seen or heard of it since that time and both assumed it had been restored and was in a collection somewhere, or per-

haps, it had been mistreated and destroyed in the late seventies or early eighties. Yet, there was this car on the online auction page and it looked just like the car that existed in 1978 - could that be true? Junior called the seller and cautiously asked a couple of questions that would cement the matter of whether or not this was his dad's old car. When Senior bought the car back in '74, it had a small dent in the deck lid that they never bothered to fix because it wasn't that big of a concern. It also had aircraft landing lights installed as headlights, because these threw off much more light than normal automotive headlights (the days before halogens). Lastly, since Garth Sr. was a painting contractor back then, one day he sat in the car with a spot of paint on the back of his britches. If the seats hadn't been changed out, there would be a spot of white paint still on the seat bottom. They asked the three very unusual questions, the seller was surprised they asked about these three things, and Garth Jr. was even more surprised when the answer was "yes" to all three! The dent was there, the headlights were there, and the paint

spot on the seat was still there - this was his dad's old Super Bee, and it hadn't been touched since 1978!

As it turned out, the fellow who bought it in '78 parked the car and left it in storage for the next two decades, preserving everything exactly as it was. The internet seller had recently purchased the car just to flip it for some extra cash. The two Garths quickly formulated a plan - they would combine their funds and shoot the works in an effort to buy the car back. It seemed like a good plan, but as the days clicked by, the selling price went higher and higher, and they were forced to watch as the price tag soared way out of range. When time ran out, the car's selling price was an impressive \$165K, which was well beyond their comfort zone. So, they were content in the knowledge that the car still existed and hoped that they might at least get to see it, perhaps at a Mopar show somewhere. Then, along came February 2009.

Garth Jr. got an RM Auction brochure in the mail, and before pitching it into the trash bin, he gave it a look



DAD'S ORIGINAL '71 HEMI CHARGER SUPER BEE



through. He paused, seeing an orange '71 Hemi Super Bee as one of the auction's offerings. The reason he paused was because the car looked like it had the weird aviation headlights like his dad's car. The description also stated the car was a survivor, like his dad's car would be considered, but this thing was the wrong color. Confused, he called the RM Auction folks to verify the Charger's color. As you've probably guessed by now, as often happens in the printing business (we're afraid to say) the printing company botched the color on the brochure and sure enough, this car was red - not orange. And, it had a small dent in the deck lid, and a small spot of paint on the driver's seat. Lightning had struck twice in the same place and Garth Jr. was floored. He quickly registered to be a phone bidder for the auction, but didn't think he had a snowball's chance given how much the car had sold for less than a year before. Still, it was listed as selling with "no reserve," so theoretically, anything was possible.

When auction day came, the nice people at RM Auctions called Garth as the Charger came onto the block, and their representative kept him up with the play-by-play, and Junior bid accordingly, because the

price was downright cheap. Then, all of a sudden, the bidding stopped cold! A few anxious moments passed, and the gavel fell; Garth Jr. had won the car back with a ridiculously low bid for an all-original Hemi Super Bee survivor. We'll not go into the price, but we can say the seller lost over \$100K in his effort to resell the car! When the boy hung up the phone he was speechless; yes, he'd just spent a bunch of money, but he'd bought back his dad's original survivor Hemi Super Bee for not much more than he had invested in his clone. Needless to say, there was great rejoicing throughout the VanCura family.

In a few weeks, the R4 Hemi Bee arrived in Michigan, where it immediately took up residence next to its nearly identical twin in Garth Jr.'s garage. After spending thirty years away, the prodigal had returned, and it was welcomed accordingly. So, these guys now have a magnificent investor-grade survivor Bee with a notable family history, a killer fast Hemi Bee clone that looks just like the museum piece next to it, and a heavily optioned one-of-one gray factory Hemi Bee that kicks butt on the show field and on Woodward Avenue. All we can say is somebody up there in Michigan's living right, because this is way too much good fortune just to be coincidence! ☘

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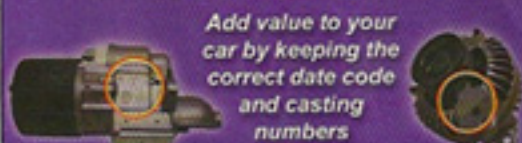
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